



# The Maryland Hunting Coalition, Inc.

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## 2017 Maryland General Assembly Session Update for Maryland's Hunting Community

*Annapolis, Maryland:* It is customary for the Maryland Hunting Coalition ("Coalition") to update the hunting community both during and at the end of the 90-day Legislative Session. On April 10, 2017, the General Assembly adjourned until January 10, 2018. We held our own during the Session, not bad given the urban mindset that prevails in the Halls of Annapolis; but, there are always dark clouds on the horizon, most notably Sunday hunting. So, let's start with that issue, followed by a brief analysis of the other issues deemed important for disclosure to our hunting brethren.

**Sunday Hunting:** The Maryland Horse Council – which proclaims to be pro-hunting – remains hell-bent on ending Sunday hunting of deer with firearms by 10:30 am in order to feel "safe" while riding. The Council realizes that a statewide proposal will be met with vehement opposition by the hunting community. So, instead, the Council has re-focused its strategy by concentrating at the local level; and, with some success this Session. There were 3 local bills to expand Sunday hunting by allowing DNR to determine – via the annual regulatory process – Sunday hunting of deer as an alternative to their existing guaranteed statutory authorization. They were Kent, Montgomery and Wicomico counties.

*NOTE: Keep in mind when a local government consents to forego existing statutory authority to hunt deer on Sundays in favor of regulatory consideration, there comes a risk. What happens if and when Maryland next elects an anti-hunting Governor who arguably could use the annual regulatory process to curtail hunting in general and end Sunday hunting in particular? Having such authorization safeguarded by law eliminates this very real future scenario.*

Lawmakers from Montgomery and Kent counties consented to a 10:30 am statutory cutoff IF DNR agrees to expand future Sunday hunting of deer via the regulatory process. Here's how it is in Montgomery County: at present, one can hunt all day for 3 different days – youth, archery and firearms. These same 3 full days are not changed; but, Montgomery has agreed with passage of House Bill 310 to forego such future full days for firearm hunting of deer only, assuming DNR authorizes additional Sunday hunting with firearms there. Here's how it is in Kent County: at present, one can hunt all day for 3 different days -- youth, archery and firearms. As amended by the Senate and concurred by the House, the guaranteed full day of archery has been eliminated and the only full day of firearm hunting is restricted to a youth hunt and a firearms hunting Sunday to be determined by DNR via House Bill 312. All future firearm hunting of deer in Kent County – again, only if allowed via DNR's regulatory decision-making – must terminate by 10:30 am. Admittedly, in both Montgomery and Kent, DNR could consent to expanded full day of archery hunting for deer; but, we'll not know until DNR next releases its regulatory framework for the 2017/2018 season; thus the importance of participation at DNR's annual hunting-regulatory meeting.

Wicomico County lawmakers rejected the 10:30 am amendment advanced by the Senate via House Bill 894.

Noteworthy is the passage of Sunday hunting in Kent County for turkey without the 10:30 am quitting time applicable to firearm deer hunting because of House Bill 312. House Bill 305 adds Kent County to Calvert, Caroline, Carroll, Charles and Dorchester that allows Sunday hunting of turkey throughout the spring turkey season. The only time limits imposed are those levied by DNR via regulations.

**Licensing of Fox Chasers:** Under Maryland law, fox chasing is not defined as hunting. Thus, those who participate do not have to purchase an annual \$24.50 resident hunting license. Legislation was introduced by the Leadership of the bi-partisan Maryland Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus (Senate Bill 1141/House Bill 1629) to change Maryland law by defining this activity as hunting; meaning, among other things, the participants would be required to have on their person written permission to traverse one's lands and possess a hunting license. The bills were introduced too late in the Session for action; but, their re-introduction in 2018 is all but certain. Of particular note is passage of House Bill 187, introduced by the St. Mary's County Delegation, which has eliminated that County's prohibition of shooting "any fox while it is being pursued by hounds". Connect the dots...

**Agriculture's Stance on Deer:** One might argue with this observation; but, it's clear to many in the hunting community that Maryland's farmers would welcome the annihilation of Maryland's deer population. Why? Because they eat their crops. Legislation was proposed that would have given a certain county statutory authorization for farmers – with DNR issued Deer Management Permits (some call them "slaughter permits") – to kill deer with rifles 7 days a week, 365 days a year akin to the legislation approved to Chapter 383/384 of

the Acts of 2016 which afford the same to holders of DMP's in Charles and St. Mary's counties – a measure regretted by many in the hunting community because of the possible domino effect. Another bill (Senate Bill 953/House Bill 1111) would have mandated additional firearm hunting of deer for all Eastern Shore counties for the two week period beginning in November and running into December plus all of January. Maryland's hunting community made clear its disdain for this kill-all strategy. Whether you side with the farmers or not, the impact of this kill-all strategy is disturbing. Think of the economics attendant to recreational deer hunting and its nexus to funding DNR's Wildlife & Heritage Service? History has shown what man can do to any species if given the opportunity.

**Funding for WHS:** DNR's Wildlife & Heritage Service is funded exclusively with monies derived from the sale of hunting licenses and stamps, matched via federal dollars under Pittman/Robertson – they are called special funds which are distinct from general funds, the latter being tax dollars collected at large. There's been a diminution of these special fund dollars over the years; mainly, because of exclusions authorized for certain military personnel – all noble and agreed upon by most within the hunting community, including the Coalition. To help offset the loss, the Coalition asked the Caucus to request the Governor include \$250,000 in a Fiscal Year 2018 Supplemental Budget (an amendment to the State's operating budget the Governor submits to the Governor in mid-March of every year following a revision of revenue estimated projected by the Comptroller's Office). And the Caucus did so; but, the Governor did not include the \$250,000 in his Supplemental Budget. However, this is a noble initiative that will be continued.

**Gun Bills:** Every Session there's an onslaught of pro and anti-gun bills introduced in Annapolis. So everyone knows, the Maryland Hunting Coalition works closely with the Caucus in developing position statements on certain gun-related measures deemed especially detrimental to the sportsmen's interests. The 2017 Session was no different and anyone seeking a copy of these Caucus statements can visit view them on the Coalition's website, *as are all the written position statement on legislation the Coalition submits*. For the record, the two gun bills that were opposed were both defeated: Senate Bill 467/House Bill 318 (Firearms Disqualifications – Antique Firearms); and Senate Bill 948 (Rifles & Shotguns – Secondary Transactions).

**Landowner Liability Exemption:** The Coalition stood with Delegate Clark and the Caucus in finally providing liability exemption for landowners who allow individuals to hunt on their property that may become injured at no fault of the landowner. Passage of House Bill 1246 should measurably enhance hunting opportunities on privately-owned land previously closed for fear of potential lawsuits.

**Apprenticeship Program:** The Coalition stood with Delegate McMillan and the Caucus in helping convince lawmakers to approve a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for certain individuals to hunt without having all Maryland licensing requirements imposed upon them. The effort was successful and House Bill 1427 was passed which should measurably enhance future recruitment.

**Canvasback as State Waterfowl:** An effort was made in 2016 to secure legislative approval for designating the canvasback as Maryland's official waterfowl. However, the effort failed. Advocates pushed again in 2017; but, met the same fate.

**Tournament Prohibition for Cownose Rays:** The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS) – headquartered in Maryland – successfully pushed for a termination of cownose ray fishing tournaments whereby archers competed for the taking of rays via passage of Senate Bill 268/House Bill 211. YouTube vides of the actions taken on the water proved too much to sensitive lawmakers. As introduced these bills would have simply prohibited future tournaments; but, the Caucus – with input from the Coalition – issued a statement of concern (ICW Maryland Bowhunter's Society) cautioning its colleagues that science should dictate fisheries management, not emotional rhetoric. Instead, a fishery management plan – which does not currently exist for the cownose ray – should be developed as a prerequisite first step. The final version of the legislation (1) requires DNR to indeed develop a fishery management plan before December 1, 2017; and (2) prohibits cownose ray fishing tournaments until July 1, 2018 – a time by which DNR's regulations will have been adopted.

**Honoring of Senator John Astle:** Senator Astle has served as the "First" Senate Co-Chair of the Maryland Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus since its inception in 2002. He also served as the "First" President of the National Assembly of Sportsmen's Caucuses – an entity charged with creating a Caucus in all 50 states (48 states currently have a Caucus). On March 25, 2017, the Coalition honored Senator Astle by bestowing upon him the title of "Maryland Sportsmen's Emeritus" at its banquet. He's deserving of this and more.

IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS, the 2017 Session of the Maryland General Assembly must be viewed as positive for Maryland's hunting community. Consider the following: (1) anticipated efforts by the Judiciary to amend the *Poaching Restitution Act of 2016* did not happen; (2) there was no repeat to commercialize the sale of venison as in 2015; (3) efforts to further deplete the State's deer population through liberal harvesting policies were thwarted; (4) efforts to end all statewide hunting of deer by 10:30 am did not happen; (5) Wicomico County lawmakers rejected the 10:30 am firearm hunting of deer in their County, unlike Montgomery and Kent; and (6) some of the gun bills deemed detrimental to sportsmen were defeated. But the Coalition must be forever vigilant. Why? The efforts by some to discredit hunting, continue the war on deer and end Sunday hunting by 10:30 am, to name a few, will continue in 2018 and beyond. In Maryland, the last line of defense for hunters is the Coalition and its affiliation with the Maryland Legislative Sportsmen's Caucus. It's a never-ending challenge and full-scale participation by our brethren is critical to the future of hunting here.